

From: rufus laggren
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/26/02 8:36pm
Subject: Break up Microsoft

In a word, do it. Separate the operating system company from the software applications development. Separate the major software applications into different companies.

And also, require the remaining (still monopolistic) companies to fully disclose:

1) Their application file formats when the product's market share rises above 30%. At about this level, it becomes a practical business necessity to utilize their formats because they become a de facto standard of exchange. Secret formats which competing applications cannot support fully, reliably, nor in a timely manner, effectively kill off all other competition in that application niche - creating a monopoly which completely stops competitive innovation.

2) The complete operating system API, that is, the feature set available for use by programs running under MS operating systems. Application programmers (eg, those who write spreadsheet software) must use these features whenever their programs display, print, communicate or use any of the hundreds of other facilities the operating system (supposedly) provides. Microsoft has historically programmed their software (like their spreadsheet) using "unsupported" "secret" features of their own operating system (Windows) which competing developers were unable to discover in a timely manner. Hence Microsoft application software had a huge advantage in relation to its competitors. Make it a crime with large penalties if, during any period when either the MS operating system or the MS software has a greater than 30% market share, Microsoft application software is found to use "undocumented" features of a Microsoft operating system. Software tools can easily locate and document all features used by a program, so this would be almost trivial to verify.

I worked as a programmer and systems analyst from 1975 to 1985 and as a PC consultant since then. From personal experience, I can say the any software

product _must_ provide full compatibility with existing standards in it's market (eg. MS Excel spreadsheet format). And the developer without full access to the API of an operating system which his product will run on ... is a complete non-starter. By concealing certain features of both its operating systems' API (claiming them as "undocumented" or "unsupported" - which means that MS will change the code at any time convenient to itself to cause that feature to disappear), and its major document formats, Microsoft has completely stifled competition in the areas of word processors, spreadsheets, and to some extent, webpage development.

The claim that systems would suddenly become unreliable without dominant standards provided by MS... does not seem credible. On the contrary, with the clear exception of its spreadsheet, Microsoft software has proven buggy and difficult to use. Their product development cycle does not seem to respond to basic low-level user complaint in the way a company eager to please its customers would.

As a private consumer and as a professional who must try to find good products for clients, I ask you to please stop the monopolizing of our largest industry. If our software economy is not to suffer the melt down that Detroit went through in the 70's when it faced real competition for the first time, we must nurture and promote effective competition, and actively discourage the cumbersome stifling business practices that MS seems to favor.

Rufus Laggren
Pacifica, Ca.

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